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SUBJECT: Ontario's Minister of Colleges and Universities Describes Education Priorities to CG

REF: Toronto 2680

11. Summary: Ontario Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities, Christopher Bentley, discussed the province's headline- grabbing high school drop out rate following recent curriculum reform, education funding, and tighter regulations for private colleges during a meeting October 17 with ConGen Toronto CG. The CG thanked Minister Bentley for helping U.S. students displaced by Hurricane Katrina and gave an overview of ConGen Toronto's student intern program. End Summary.

One Third of Ontario's Students Drop Out of High School

12. Minister Bentley reiterated government of Ontario statements that one-third of students leave high school early. Curriculum changes in 1999 which eliminated "grade 13" have augmented the drop out rate. He commented on plans to create an alternative, trades-focused high school diploma to reduce the drop out rate. The alternative diploma will be introduced with legislation requiring students to stay in school until age 18, rather than the current age of 16. Minister Bentley said that the alternative high school diploma, along with expanded cooperative learning and apprenticeship programs, will give students better opportunities for achievement.

Ontario Invests in Education

13. Minister Bentley explained that the government is investing heavily in all levels of education. He referred to the October 12 Throne Speech (reftel) in which the government outlined its commitment to invest C\$6.2 billion more in universities, colleges, apprenticeships, and skills programs. Minister Bentley stated that his government considers investments in education essential to give Ontario's workforce the skills it needs in the rapidly changing global competition for investment and jobs.

Tighter Regulations for Private Career Colleges in Ontario

14. Minister Bentley said that private career colleges operate under weak guidelines. Investigations of financial scandal involving a private career college in Toronto have recently gained media attention. He anticipates changes to the Private Career Colleges Act will tighten requirements for operation and give students financial insurance. He does not support Charter schools or high schools. Charter High Schools, which are both privately and publicly funded, do not operate in the province. However, he commented that single-race high schools might exist due to demographics.

Bilateral Academic Exchanges Get an 'A'

15. Both the CG and Minister Bentley expressed their support for bilateral academic exchange programs. Minister Bentley commented that the government is eager to help American institutions build relationships with colleges and universities in Ontario. The CG gave the Minister a brief overview of ConGen Toronto's foreign national student internship program.

SCHIMMEL